



## IRRI Press Statement on World Refugee Day 2021

*Together we can heal, learn and shine*

We, at International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), stand united with displaced and stateless persons. We believe that no one should be left behind, particularly in times of great hardship such as those currently being experienced around the world due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Especially in resource poor contexts, displaced and stateless persons struggle to access the limited basic and essential services, including healthcare and education.

In order to live dignified lives, displaced persons require interventions and solutions that are durable, sustainable and impactful, and also, that are people-centred, contextual and aimed at reaffirming their dignity, rights and agency. They further need to be aimed at ensuring self-reliance of refugees which in turn builds their resilience. Even in countries like Uganda with progressive refugee policies, the responsibility for realising self-reliance is placed on refugees despite the systemic and structural issues that are also part of the problem. In addition, a narrow focus on employability and economic incentives and opportunities, is insufficient to ensure that refugees can build resilience, without considering other essential aspects of their lives such as education, health, housing, legal access and community support structures, as being part of the self-reliance rubric.

During the 3-month lockdown in 2020, refugees suffered a decimation of their small businesses exposing them to food insecurity, evictions and arrest. Early this year, IRRI conducted a rapid needs assessment on urban refugees, where it was clear that there was no resilience amongst refugees to withstand the existing inequalities faced by them, which were exacerbated by the restriction measures. Many were forced into risky behaviour for survival. Furthermore, there was a dearth of access to essential services for refugees, as humanitarian agencies and implementing partners were unable to continue their work. As Uganda returns to a lockdown situation, the well-being of refugees remains of great concern as most have not recovered their sources of income and livelihood from the last lockdown, and WFP has cut their food subsidies by 60% due to funding shortages.

As stated by IRRI's Executive Director, Achieng Akena, "refugees must not be ignored! They must be included and provided for as a vulnerable community in Uganda. They must be allowed agency and concomitant resources to enable them to respond to the specific modalities of the challenges they face". Joanita Nantume, Programme Associate at IRRI, further added, "Refugees are human beings just like you and I. We bleed the same blood, we feel the same pain. They must not be left to suffer alone".

We need to have refugees empowered and protected so that *together we can heal, learn and shine!*

For more information contact us on +256 758 595 554 or e-mail: [info@refugee-rights.org](mailto:info@refugee-rights.org)